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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5772
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 7333
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4701
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8609
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5836
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3053
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3253
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3704
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5039
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5691
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0298
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0721
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003100

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN PRESS ATTACKED

REF: LA PAZ 2854

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The past weeks have been marked by government rhetoric against press bias. On November 26, following a large rally where President Morales and several social sector leaders verbally attacked the media, violence erupted against both journalists and media headquarters. After Evo accused the press of "lying" and incited his supporters, his presidential spokesman deplored the violence and denied any relationship between the attacks and Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) affiliated social groups. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On November 24 at a ceremony to award a Venezuelan check to a municipal government in the department of Cochabamba, President Morales accused some journalists of "lying to the country." He claimed that the owners of the media outlets were forcing journalists to distort the news and distribute false information about the way in which the new constitution was approved by the Constituent Assembly. He asked the gathering if they wanted the press to continue to lie and was met with a resounding, "No, no, no!"

¶3. (SBU) On November 26 when Evo led a large protest of campesinos and coca leaf producers in front of the Senate building in La Paz, he reiterated his attacks against press "bias and distortion." His accusations were picked up by community leaders. Edgar Patana, the El Alto leader of the Workers Regional Federation, told the crowd that much of the media had sold out to "neoliberalism" and could only see their own commercial interests. He added ominously that, "El Alto will take care of the media." Fidel Surco, leader of an indigenous syndicate group, blamed the media for the riots and tumult surrounding events in Sucre over the weekend. Speeches were met by chants of "Death to the media that doesn't tell the truth."

¶4. (SBU) Following the demonstrations, a mob attacked members of the press during an interview with Justice Minister Celima Torrico. The crowd accosted journalists from various media outlets and broke cameras. Following these attacks, the crowd moved to the radio station headquarters of Fides, the most influential and credible radio network in Bolivia, where they painted the walls with threats such as "you are warned." By the evening, the group had broken windows and thrown rocks at the TV networks of Unitel, PAT,

ATB.

15. (SBU) After the violence, the Vice Minister for the Coordination of Social Movements, Sacha Llorenti, announced that the social movements that had gathered for the Senate protests were not to blame for the attacks. Presidential Spokesman Alex Contreras appeared on a morning news broadcast and condemned the violence against the media, but he too said that none of the MAS-affiliated social groups were to blame.

Comment

16. (C) Attacks on the media will likely continue as Bolivia heads toward more turbulent political waters. It should be noted that Bolivia recently fell from 16 to 68 in the Reporters Without Borders annual press freedom index. Moreover, we view with concern government moves to own media outlets. The state already owns a network of radio stations and recently announced plans to launch a television network in 2008 financed by the Venezuelan government.
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